

Here in the United States, we lock up the biggest percentage of the population of any country in the world. The chances of landing in prison are 8 to 10 times higher here than in other industrial countries. And yet this is a far more dangerous country than most: Violent crime is far worse here than in Canada or Britain or France or Germany. So, clearly, locking people up hasn't made us safer.

In Texas, there are 127,000 people in prison. That's nearly equal to the prison population of the whole United States less than 20 years ago. We also execute more criminals in Texas than in any other State. And yet, I don't think anyone would say that we've turned the corner on crime.

These days, people look at prisons as a way of punishment, and the harsher the better.

Ironically, prisons were invented as a more humane way to treat criminals. Prisons were supposed to replace brutal punishments that left offenders scarred or maimed—punishments that the Constitution calls "cruel and unusual." The idea was to create a penitentiary. The word "penitentiary" was meant to describe a place where the miscreant would be isolated so that he could think about his offense and become penitent. The offender would spend a great deal of time alone, and be trained in a useful occupation. The idea was, in short, not just to punish, but to rehabilitate offenders.

These days, the 19th century idea of penitentiaries is mostly forgotten. And yet, the best run Federal prison today—the one that costs the least to run, the one where there is the least violence among inmates, and the one where the inmates are least likely to become repeat offenders—is run exactly along the lines of the 19th century idea of prison as a tool of reform and rehabilitation. In other words, we actually can compare a humane prison against a brutal one, and we can see the results: the humane prison is cheaper to run and gets effective results; the brutal prison is more costly and only poisons prisoners and communities alike.

Of course, not everyone can be rehabilitated. But in this season of hope and renewal, we ought to think about the growth of prisons, and ask ourselves why we are pouring more and more resources into a system that clearly does not work.

There was a time when people were jailed if they failed to pay their debts. It was a curious and self-defeating thing: a person obviously could not pay a debt while in jail, so debtors' prisons were a burden on everybody: the creditor didn't get paid, the prisoner couldn't pay, and the local government ended up saddled with jails full of honest folks whose only crime was to be in debt.

This got to be a real problem in the city of Edinburgh, Scotland in the year 1742. So the city's government did a wise thing: they commissioned an art-

ist to write a musical piece, hoping that the resulting concert would raise some money to pay off the debts of some of the people who'd been imprisoned for debt.

The composer who got the job was George F. Handel, and in just 26 days he produced the gigantic oratorio, "The Messiah," and it was a great hit: the city raised a great deal of money, paid off the debts of a number of prisoners, and freed them.

Today, it's hard to imagine a city council smart enough to commission a concert to raise money to free prisoners. But we should think about the lesson here: surely there is a better thing to do than make a failing system even worse.

After all, you can't quarrel with the results that the city fathers of Edinburgh got for their trouble: "The Messiah" was an instant success, and it freed prisoners and community alike of a terrible situation. What's more, "The Messiah" is the most performed choral work in history.

If you happen to hear "The Messiah" performed this year, remember it was written because a local government wanted to make some money and free some prisoners.

Maybe we can think about it, and come up with ways to free ourselves of the burden of a prison system which produces far more burdens than it does results. The least we can do in this season of hope and renewal is to ask ourselves why it makes sense to have more and harsher prisons, when the evidence is that prisons that try to rehabilitate prisoners, actually do get results, and are safer and cheaper to run.

Shouldn't we think about the possibilities?

WE SUPPORT OUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS IN BOSNIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. WELDON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon to address the issue of Bosnia and to outline the text of a resolution that was introduced yesterday by my colleague on the other side, PAUL MCHALE, and I, both members of the House Committee on National Security.

Mr. Speaker, I have consistently opposed the President's policy on Bosnia and I oppose it today. I voted for the motions to lift the arms embargo because I felt we were not leveling the playing field in that country. We could have prevented many of the atrocities that have occurred there over the past several years, the ones that President Clinton talked to the American people about just a week ago.

I supported the resolution in opposition to the President sending in ground troops. I think it is a grave mistake to put our young people in the midst of this turmoil, and in fact have stated so repeatedly and believe today that we are making a mistake.

However, Mr. Speaker, the President is the Commander in Chief, and has the ability to deploy our troops where he sees fit. Unfortunately, this President, despite votes taken in this body and the other body, overwhelmingly bipartisan, objecting to his policy, has already committed our troops to Bosnia. There is not much we can do about that, Mr. Speaker, and that is unfortunate.

However, Mr. Speaker, we can in fact do something now, and that is what my resolution and the resolution joined by my friend, Mr. MCHALE does. Our resolution acknowledges that this Congress has gone on record repeatedly against inserting ground troops. Our resolution also acknowledges that the President is the Commander in Chief and, as such, can send our troops and deploy them where he wants.

The resolution does state that we in this Congress overwhelmingly support the sons and daughters of America serving in our military who are going to be deployed to Bosnia. But furthermore and perhaps most significantly, what our resolution says is that now that this President has committed our troops, there will be no political second-guessing of the support necessary for them to complete their mission.

The reason why we make this statement, Mr. Speaker, is just a few short years ago when our troops were in Somalia, a request was made by the general in charge of those troops for backup support. We would later find out that that request was denied. When asked why it was denied, the Secretary of Defense at that time, Les Aspin, a friend of mine until he passed away a few short months ago, said that the political climate in Washington was not right to deploy more troops to that theater.

Mr. Speaker, we must never again allow a political decision to decide the fate of our troops. In Somalia, 18 young men and women were killed because we did not provide the adequate backup 1 month after a request was made for additional support. That must not happen in this case and will not happen, because my resolution says that whatever General Joulwan wants in the way of backup, whether it be personnel, whether it be heavy artillery, whether it be air support, or whatever that need is, that there be no political second-guessing from the White House. The DOD and the administration must immediately respond to the request determined by the general in charge of the theater who has been given the responsibility to protect the lives of our kids.

Mr. Speaker, this is the least that we can do to protect our young Americans who are being assigned by this President to go into a hostile area that most of us agree they should not be going to. I ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join us.

We already have bipartisan support. The numbers are growing. We have been joined by Mr. KENNEDY on the other side, by Mr. CUNNINGHAM on our

side, and by a number of other Members, and I would ask our colleagues to call my office today, or Mr. MCHALE's office, to sign up as cosponsors so that we can let this President know that while we disagree with him, he is going to give our troops the support that they need, they deserve and they warrant in terms of the operation in the Bosnian theater.

NATIONAL DEBT CONTINUES TO GROW

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maine [Mr. LONGLEY] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LONGLEY. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Lisa and Melinda for helping me bring out today's total of the debt. As of 3 o'clock this afternoon, the United States national debt is \$4,988,640,469,699.34. For the second day in a row, it is actually a decrease of \$125 million over yesterday.

Now, to reassure anyone who might think that we have suddenly reversed course in Washington, I want you to know that, unfortunately, that is not the case. In fact, the debt will fluctuate on a daily basis, but overall, during the current fiscal year, we can expect that the Federal debt will probably increase by another \$200 billion. In short, we will pass the \$5 trillion mark at some point in the next 6 or 7 months.

Having said that, again, I rise before this House, Mr. Speaker, to point out the incredible burden that this debt presents, not only to this generation, but to the generation represented by Lisa and Melinda and other generations that will follow us in the future. The \$5 trillion is almost 40 percent of every nickel and dime that the Federal Government will spend over the next 7 years.

Now, one of the reasons that I think it is important that this number be brought to our attention on a daily basis is that I think we have a hard time as a country realizing that this is not some abstract number that has no meaning to the way we live our lives.

During my campaign for office in 1994, I campaigned on a theme of pay-roll taxes. Specifically, I would talk in various troops around my district about the fact that if I went into a store in Maine and bought a pack of cigarettes, I would pay three taxes. If I bought a can of beer, I would pay four taxes. And we call those taxes on beer and cigarettes sin taxes, because they are taxes designed to discourage our behavior, behavior that we consider adverse to our health.

Well, yet, then what do we say when, if I created a job and I pay or manage 9 different taxes in the State of Maine and a number close to that in other States across the country, and those 9 taxes on a job total almost 25 or 30 percent of the total cost of hiring an employee, then what do we call that? Does it become a sin today to create a job or

create economic opportunity for an individual?

I would suggest before this Chamber that there is a connection between an extremely high tax burden across the country, again 9 taxes and almost 25 percent of gross cost at the minimum wage, not at a high wage, not at some \$100,000 salary level, but at a lousy \$4.25 an hour. In fact, the minimum wage today really is an appropriate term to describe the problem that men and women have when they find a job. The real issue today is take-home pay, not minimum wage. When you look at the difference between the two, it is staggering.

Now, I mentioned yesterday that I have been criticized by a columnist in a local paper back in my district that this was a waste of time.

Specifically, this editor had objected to the fact that I was faxing the debt total out to him and other editors throughout my district on a daily basis. In fact, he criticized me and he said, "Congressman LONGLEY should consider his own contribution to the national debt by his wasting of our tax dollars on faxes such as this, which cost paper, employee time, computer time, et cetera."

The editor went on to say, "I intend to let him know that we do not need to see a new fax each day or ever again. Thank you."

Now, the irony is that these several paragraphs were maybe less than 20 percent of a column describing the need of the local community to look ahead in planning the use of their downtown.

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I point that out, and in some sense this is humorous but there is also a very serious point that needs to be made and this is fundamentally the problem that we must confront as a Congress and we must confront as a country, is that Washington has become so remote from day-to-day life in America, from what goes on in our town halls, and in our State governments, that we have ceased to realize that the debt is actually a tangible factor that affects the way we live our lives, and when the editor of a prominent local paper suggests, when talking about downtown improvements, that the city cannot afford to just keep chugging along not particularly worried about the future, it would not hurt to think again.

Again, this is the ultimate issue. This debt not only is a monument to an incredible level of spending but it represents the fact that Washington has gone beyond a high level of taxes, it has gone beyond a high level of spending, and it has actually spent far more than it has taken in and it is now threatening to leave a \$5 trillion stone around the necks of our children and our grandchildren and the future of this country.

In my opinion, with all due respect to this editor, there is no issue more im-

portant than once and for all coming to grips with this national tragedy.

SUPPORT VOICED FOR PRESIDENTIAL VETO OF RECONCILIATION BILL

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FOLEY). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Minnesota [Mr. VENTO] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. VENTO. Mr. Speaker, I seek this time today to voice my support for the President's veto of the reconciliation measure that was returned to the House with a long message yesterday that was read into the RECORD.

In that message, of course, the President touched on, I think, the elemental points of equity, of fairness, of the Congress' responsibility to try to achieve laws that in fact provide for the needs of the people that we represent. That in doing so in terms of attempting to achieve a balance in the budget that we also balance the responsibilities and the sacrifices that are expected in a fair way to provide for our success as a Nation today and into the future.

In fact, of course, today as we look at the economy and the progress that has been made in this administration, it is, I think, encouraging, that since 1993 there are 6 million new jobs that have been created, the deficit on an annual basis is on a glidepath, that does not mean that we can stop in terms of our work, that in fact we must continue to deal with attempting to achieve savings.

There are, of course, today 150,000 fewer Federal employees than there were when the President took office. So we are making some success.

But the President pointed out in that deficit message specifically the type of inordinate cuts that are being proposed in Medicare. The President, of course, has been foremost in his responsibility and advocacy for health care reform. In fact I think the first 2 years one of the major shortcomings that occurred was the future, of course, of a health care reform proposal, an effort to rationalize the system.

Today I think the President, too, would not argue that his plan was the only plan in terms of health care reform but that it was necessary to rationalize that system to bring these costs into control and the services in a way that would inure to the benefit of the people that we represent.

So that similarly when the President points out the types of cuts in Medicare, I think he does it, in a sense, standing on the high ground because of the work that he has done. Similarly the significant cuts in Medicare. In fact, half the cuts in the budget proposed by this new Congress, this Republican Congress, have been in the area of Medicare and Medicaid cuts.

Furthermore, of course, the President indicated his opposition and concern to many other elements in terms of the welfare reform.